CHAPTER 2

FORESTWIDE DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

This chapter describes forestwide desired future conditions (DFCs), goals, and objectives. Additional DFCs and goals for each management area are contained in Chapter 4, ``Management Area Goals, Desired Future Conditions, Standards, and Guidelines."

Desired future condition is a description of the conditions and changes that are expected to occur as the Forest Plan is implemented. It is also a description of resource conditions, capabilities, ecosystem functions, and human interaction.

Goals are concise statements that describe an intended result normally expressed in broad, general terms without a specific time frame for achievement. Goals are reached by attaining specific objectives or by adhering to certain standards and guidelines. Not all goals have quantifiable objectives.

Objectives are concise statements that describe a specific result or condition desired to contribute toward achieving a goal. Objectives are measurable steps taken to accomplish a goal and may be accomplished by maintaining a desired condition or by implementing a project or activity. Objectives are for the 10-year period following Forest Plan approval.

Forestwide Desired Future Conditions

The public participates in planning, managing, and monitoring of the national forests. An adaptive, ecological approach is used in multiple-use management by blending the needs of people with environmental values to ensure that forest ecosystems are diverse, healthy, productive, and sustainable.

National Forests in Florida plays a major role in ecosystem protection and maintenance of biodiversity in close partnership with the State of Florida. Partnerships with other national forests, other agencies, groups, local communities, organizations, and tribal governments provide a collaborative approach to national forest management. *National Forests in Florida* recognizes and embraces the Florida greenways system and the role the forest plays as a major hub of greenspace in the statewide plan for greenways. An interconnected system of greenways will help to prevent fragmented populations and ecosystems.

A mosaic of forest stands is spread across most of the landscape. Vegetation patterns reflect natural disturbances, as well as planned harvest activities and historic landscapes which result from past human activity. Some longleaf and slash pine stands will contain a variety of ages, sizes, and densities of trees, while others will be more homogenous such that one or two ages are found. Large, old trees are common. Sand pine scrub forests are characterized by large, even-aged stands. Hardwood forests have little evidence of timber harvest except on drier, pine inclusions.

Water quality in streams, ponds, wetlands, and riparian areas reflects healthy, functioning aquatic ecosystems. Soil productivity is maintained. Nutrient levels and nutrient-cycling processes continue to function. Water quality is maintained and, in some cases, improved. Air quality is maintained, although portions of the forests may experience some temporary reduction in air quality as a result of prescribed fire.

Adequate habitat is provided for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species so populations are no longer considered at risk.

Fire plays an increased role in maintaining many upland forest ecosystems. The risk of resource-damaging wildfires is reduced due to a reduction in fuels by prescribed burning. Evidence of fire is in most upland pine sites, except sand pine. Fire-dependent ecosystems are burned frequently during growing season to mimic the extent, duration, and intensity fire naturally played in this ecosystem.

There is evidence of natural disturbances from insects and diseases. Insects and diseases contribute to many ecological processes, including nutrient cycling and plant succession. A higher level of tree mortality occurs because of older aged trees. Integrated pest management continues to be used as the strategy to manage pest populations.

Forests are consolidated in ownership patterns. Key tracts containing cultural resources, geologic features, riparian areas, unique plant and animal habitats, recreational opportunities, and wetlands are acquired. All property boundaries are legally located, highly visible, and free of unauthorized encroachments.

Significant botanical, cultural/historical, geological, and scenic sites are protected, managed, and interpreted.

Forests provide a tranquil retreat from the fast pace of city life. Evidence of human activities exists in most areas of the forests, although most activities remain subordinate to the characteristic landscape. National forest landscapes show less evidence of human disturbance compared to adjacent private forestlands.

Forests are popular destinations for a wide range of recreational visitors. Many areas and a variety of trails provide semiprimitive recreational opportunities. The Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) is dedicated to long-term public use. The FNST is also the backbone for the statewide greenways system. Additional areas are added to the wilderness system. Several rivers are added to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. National forests represent key areas in the Florida greenways system and coordinate recreation opportunities with other adjacent public lands.

There are opportunities to enjoy both developed and dispersed recreational activities and opportunities for consumptive, as well as nonconsumptive, use of forest resources. Opportunities exist for bird-watching, fishing, hunting, gathering forest resources, learning about past human occupation, photographing, and simply enjoying nature. Expansion and enhancement of developed recreation facilities are made possible through private/public partnership opportunities.

Management of forest vegetation focuses on maintaining or restoring the natural range of diversity in age, species, and conditions for ecosystem health. National forests sustain timber harvesting without impairing the health of ecosystems. Annual timber production is lower than in previous decades. The forests continue to produce large, quality pine sawtimber products. Hardwood forests are not managed for timber production. Clearcutting is a common regeneration method for sand pine forests but is used less often in other forest types. All harvest methods are available and are determined based on the management area, desired future condition, and site-specific analysis.

National forests contribute to the economic diversity of local communities. Economic benefits from wood products are maintained, while benefits from wildlife and recreation are a larger proportion of forest benefits.

New road construction is minimal. A higher proportion of roads are closed to motorized travel than in previous decades. The road system continues to provide adequate access for public and administrative use.

Forestwide Goals

1. Ensure a philosophy of service is paramount in our relationship with the public in the management of forest resources.

2. Be aggressive and innovative in providing for public participation in planning, managing, and monitoring of the national forests.

3. Strengthen partnerships and actively pursue communication, cooperation, and partnerships with other national forests, other agencies, groups, local communities, organizations, and tribal governments to serve the public interest, consistent with the Forest Service Mission.

4. Meet regularly and often with county commissioners, congressional staff, tribal governments, and State agency directors to ensure a high level of positive communication needed to maintain national forests for quality public uses and values.

5. Contribute to the social and economic well-being of local communities by promoting sustainable use of renewable natural resources and participating in efforts to devise creative solutions for economic health.

6. Maintain or, where necessary, restore ecosystem composition, structure, and function within the natural range of variability in all ecosystems, with emphasis on longleaf pine-wiregrass, sand pine-oak scrub, pine flatwoods, hardwood/cypress, oak hammock ecosystems, and other imperilled specialized communities.

7. Manage floodplains, groundwater, lakes, riparian areas, springs, streams, and wetlands to protect or enhance their individual values and ecological functions.

8. Conserve and protect important elements of diversity—such as endangered and threatened species habitat, declining natural communities, and uncommon biological, ecological, or geological sites.

9. Manage for habitat conditions to recover and sustain viable populations of all native species, with special emphasis on rare species.

10. Apply prescribed burning technology as a primary tool for restoring fire's historic role in ecosystems.

11. Interpret forest attributes such as scenic byways, cultural sites, and special areas. Interpret forest management practices, emphasizing how sand pine clearcutting and prescribed fire improve ecosystem functions.

12. Provide a wide range of accessible recreation opportunities to accommodate the varied ability levels of forest visitors.

13. Provide safe and enjoyable visitor opportunities at developed recreation areas by maintaining, retrofitting, or replacing recreation facilities or upgrading amenities.

14. Provide a system of marked recreational trails and support facilities that will promote a variety of experiences for both motorized and nonmotorized trail users.

15. Protect rivers and preserve their cultural/historical, ecological, fish and wildlife, recreational, geological, or scenic values.

16. Increase public awareness of wilderness values. Protect and enhance resources, quality, and wilderness character of designated wilderness areas.

17. Preserve significant heritage resources as remnants of our cultural heritage by locating, evaluating, and protecting heritage resource sites.

18. Obtain a national forest ownership pattern that reduces management costs and helps meet ecosystem management objectives. Acquire land to connect large tracts of public ownership to maintain biologic and hydrologic linkages in partnerships with other public agencies. Locate and maintain national forest boundaries that are visible to forest users and neighbors.

19. Protect, enhance, and, where necessary, restore the forests' scenery resource values.

Forestwide Objectives

1. Implement surveys for determining public satisfaction with *National Forests in Florida* programs.

2. Ensure innovative and aggressive public involvement in national forest management by developing partnership documents with other national forests and public groups and with local, State, and other Federal agencies, and tribal governments.

3. Restore between 10,000 and 15,000 acres of off-site slash pine to the appropriate native vegetation in the next 10 years. Remove slash pine from 8,000 acres of mixed longleaf/slash pine stands on the Osceola NF. The long-term objective is to restore all the off-site slash pine to the appropriate native vegetation.

4. Prescribe burn on average every 3 years with varied intervals on any given site to restore natural processes in all sites where the natural-fire-return interval was less than 10 years. Strive to burn 50 percent of those acres between March 15 and September 30 and 20 percent between May 1 and July 31. This includes wilderness, wilderness study areas, and the Savannah research natural area.

5. Thin 45,000 to 55,000 acres of longleaf and slash pine stands to release overcrowded live crowns, favor appropriate pine species regeneration, increase stand growth, allow more sunlight onto the forest floor, and increase suitable habitat for red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCWs).

6. Initiate uneven-aged management with group selection harvests on 30,000 to 33,000 acres principally in longleaf pine forests with some in slash pine forests.

7. Replace between 500 and 1,000 acres of the off-site sand pine to the appropriate native vegetation in the next 10 years. The long-term objective is to restore the off-site sand pine to the appropriate native vegetation.

8. Provide habitat capability to support an increasing population of RCWs. The 10-year population objectives are 500 active clusters on the Apalachicola habitat management area (HMA), 250 active clusters on the Wakulla HMA, 151 active clusters on the Osceola HMA, 32 active clusters on the Island HMA, and 12 active clusters on the Paisley HMA. The long-term objectives are 500 active clusters on the Apalachicola HMA, 506 active clusters on the Wakulla HMA, 457 active clusters on the Osceola HMA, 67 active clusters on the Island HMA, and 81 active clusters on the Paisley HMA. The objective for the designated recovery populations (Apalachicola Ranger District and Osceola NF) is to have at least 250 breeding pairs fledging young annually. In unrecovered populations, recruitment clusters should equal approximately 10 percent of active clusters, depending on population demographics.

9. Maintain a dynamic system of at least 45,000 to 55,000 acres of habitat capable of supporting scrub-jays on the Ocala NF. The 10-year population objective is 742 to 907 groups.

10. Complete the inventory of existing scenic conditions and proposed scenic classes and implement updated Scenery Management System within 3 years of the adoption of this plan.

11. Make at least 20 percent of the developed site (level 3 and above) recreation opportunities universally accessible. Provide fully accessible opportunities on at least one swimming area, one hiking trail, and one fishing pier/boating site per forest. The long-term objective is to make all developed sites universally accessible.

12. Upgrade, refurbish, or replace four recreation facilities per year.

13. Within 2 years of Forest Plan approval, develop implementation plans for a system of designated trails and marked, numbered roads in areas where motorized vehicles and bicycles are restricted (*see* Access Maps, Appendix A). This process will incorporate existing travelways as much as possible and include public participation and collaboration with local user groups.

14. Establish and certify for public use the remaining 750 miles of the Florida National Scenic Trail needed to complete a continuous trail from Big Cypress National Preserve to Gulf Islands National Seashore.

15. Evaluate for significance five archeological sites each year.

16. Evaluate Choctawhatchee lands that no longer exhibit national forest character and consider for exchange for lands adjacent to or within the Apalachicola, Ocala, and Osceola NFs. Exchange national forest land along the Ocklawaha River for State-owned land within national forest boundaries. Exchange Forest Service-owned minerals under Withlachoochee and Blackwater State Forests for land within Pinhook purchase unit.

17. Acquire land within the 170,600-acre Pinhook purchase unit. Within the Apalachicola, Ocala, and Osceola NFs, annually acquire a minimum of 200 acres of forest inholdings. Acquire 6,500 acres adjacent to the Ocala NF.

18. Initiate irregular shelterwood harvests on between 1,800 and 2,000 acres of slash pine forests.

19. Regenerate between 39,000 and 41,000 acres of sand pine on the Ocala NF.

20. Designate the following acres of future old growth by community type (Table 2.1):

Table 2.1

Old-Growth Community Objectives

Old-Growth Community	Acres
Upland Longleaf Pine Forest	10,200
Southern Wet Pine Forest, Woodland, and Savannah	11,000
Cypress/Tupelo Swamp Forest	17,700
River Floodplain Hardwood Forest	2,900
Hardwood Wetland Forest	24,200
Dry and Dry Mesic Oak/Pine Forest	2,200
Coastal Plain Upland Mesic Hardwood Forest	1,700
Dry and Xeric Oak Forest, Woodland, and Savannah	2,100

21. Provide the following habitat conditions in the next 10 years (Table 2.2):

Table 2.2

Habitat Association Objectives

Habitat Association	Apalachicola NF	Osceola NF	Ocala NF
Sandhill and Scrubby Flatwoods			
0-10 age class	8,152	0	2,947
11-30 age class	7,820	0	9,090
31-80 age class	7,034	0	8,786
81+ age class	7,059	0	25,485
Mesic Flatwoods and Wet Flatwoods			
0-10 age class	1,500	1,000	78
11-30 age class	60,413	27,598	10,537
31-80 age class	158,813	76,541	22,975
81+ age class	63,630	15,346	4,557
Xeric Hammock, Upland Hardwood Forest, and Slope Forest			
0-20 age class	400	0	834
21-60 age class	1,717	53	5,449
61-100 age class	4,231	158	4,251
101+ age class	542	0	530
Scrub			
0-10 age class	0	0	40,000
11-30 age class	0	0	91,919
31-50 age class	0	0	53,435
51+ age class	0	0	20,789
Bottomland Forest, Floodplain Swamp, Hydric Hammock, Baygall, Basin Swamp, Strand Forest, and Dome Swamp			
0-20 age class	1,145	380	326
21-60 age class	1,995	1,280	1,642
61-100 age class	88,541	43,835	27,886
101+ age class	7,454	207	1,580
Bog, Seepage Slope, Depression Marsh, Wet Prairie/Savannahs	6,043	980	101
Titi/Brush	133,573	10,005	0
Aquatic (Lakes, Rivers, Streams, Ponds)	4,936	2,129	18,263